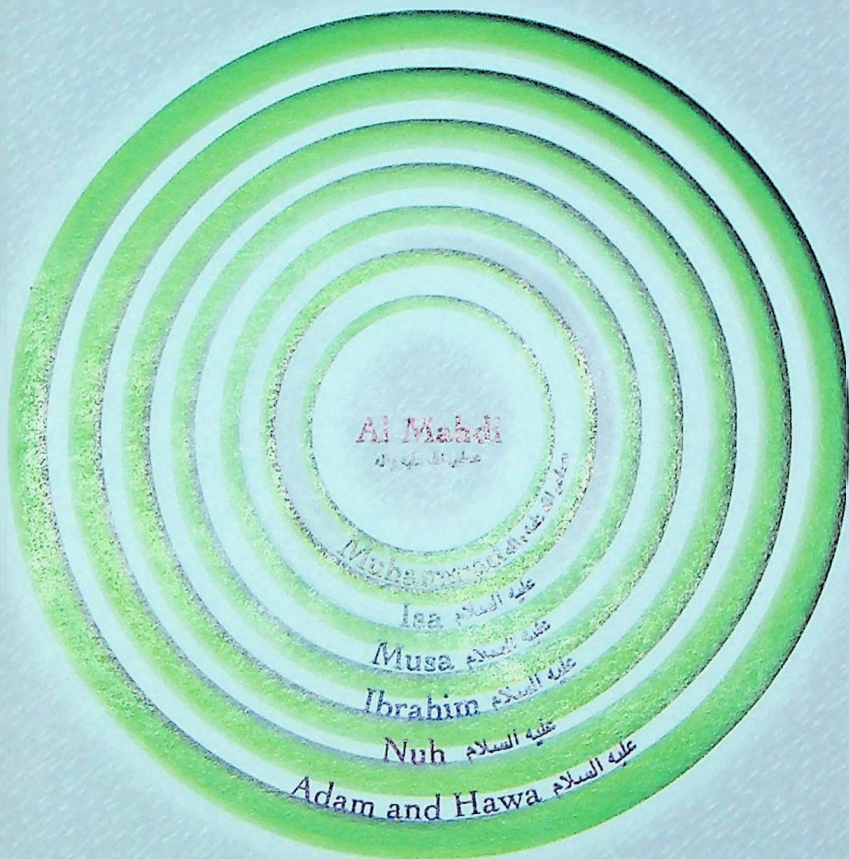


بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

FAITH – FULL: THE PROPHET IBRAHIM

By Shaykh Ahmed Abdur Rashid



Third in a seven part series:

ULU-L-AZIM THE GREAT ONES



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THE PROPHET IBRAHIM**

by
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Lecture by Shaykh Ahmed Abdur Rashid
 at the Zaawiyah of
 Shaykh Nooruddeen Durkee
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Sura al Fatiha

AL-HAMDU-LI-LLĀHI, MUQALIBA-L-QULŪBI WA-L-
 ABSĀR.
 ALLĀHUMMA THABIT QULŪBANA ʿALA SIRĀTIKA-L-
 QAWIM,
 WA-JʿALNĀ LI-WAJHIKA MUTTAJIHIN,
 WA SALLI ʿALA-Sh-ShAFIʿI-L-HABĪB,
 RAḤMATIL-ʿĀLAMĪN,
 WA MANĀRI-L-NAJIYĪN, WA MARSĀ-L-ʿĀRIFĪN

Praise be to Allah, the Turner of the hearts and sight.
 O Allah, fix our hearts on the best of Your ways,
 and make us face You in our way,
 and bestow blessings on the beloved intercessor,
 the mercy of all the worlds,
 the lighthouse of the survivors, the harbor of the knowers.

YĀ MAWJŪDAN ʿINDA-Sh-ShADĀĀʾIDI
 YĀ KHAFIYYA-L-LUTFI, YĀ LATĪFA-S-SUNʿI
 YĀ HALĪMAN, LĀ YAʼJILUQDI HĀJATĪ
 BI-RAḤMATIKA, YĀ ARḤAMA-R-RĀḤIMĪN.
 SUBḤĀNAKA ʿALĀ HILMIKA BAʿDA ʿILMIK.
 SUBḤĀNAKA ʿALĀ ʿAFWIKA BAʿDA QUDRATIK

O Existent One, O Thou who are Present in all difficulties.
 O Thou of Hidden Kindness, of Subtle making.
 O Gentle One, Who does not hasten, fulfill my need,
 With Thy Mercy, O most Merciful of the Mercifuls.
 Glory be to Thee, on Thy Grace, after Thy Knowledge.
 Glory be to Thee, on Thy forgiveness, after Thy Power.

INTRODUCTION

Today we are speaking about The Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام, but let us begin by asking the question: who was The Prophet Ibrahim? What was his character?

We are told that he was a pious human being; an obedient human being. He was compassionate; generous. He was extremely committed to the reality of one Truth, Allah (*Subhaanahu wa idaalaa*).

Allah says of him in Sura Al Imran:

مَا كَانَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ يَهُودِيًّا وَلَا نَصْرَانِيًّا وَلَكِنْ كَانَ حَنِيفًا مُسْلِمًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

MĀ KĀNA IB'RAHĪMU YAHŪDIYYAN̄-WA LĀ
NASRĀNIYYAN̄-WA LĀKIN̄ KĀNA HANĪFAM-
MUSLIMAN̄-WA MĀ KĀNA MINA-L-
MUSHRIKĪN.

Ibrahim was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was one of pure faith (*haneef*) who was wholly surrendered [to Allah], and he was not from the polytheists. [3:67]

Still today he is an example for all people and every nation. He was not a Jew, he was not a Christian. He was "*hanifam musliman*"—an upright man who had submitted to Allah. Who was he? He was and is still the friend of Allah, in submission to Allah. He exemplified in his life the steadfast trust and dedication of a believer. With that affirmation of trust came the many hard choices a believer has to make. As a Prophet, his choices and challenges were matched to the heights of his sincerity and conviction to the depth of his submission and trust.

We all have hard spiritual choices to make in life. Sometimes, these choices are so hard that it can seem logical, reasonable, and easy to make the wrong choice. As we look today at the stories and choices

of The Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام we will see his example in the face of what many of us would consider impossible choices.

The Prophet Ibrahim's عليه السلام life exemplifies one who lives in complete submission and trust in Allah (*Subhaanahu wa idaalaa*); one who chooses Allah over himself, over family; and even over life. We can see that affirmation of his submission to Allah (*Subhaanahu wa idaalaa*) at key stages in his life: as a young man, as a son, as a husband, and as a father. At each stage the Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام faces mortality, making choices of life and death; while it might seem to the ignorant observer that in these situations he chooses "death," the reality is that he chooses Allah (*Subhaanahu wa idaalaa*)—he chooses to obey and submit to Allah (*Subhaanahu wa idaalaa*), not knowing the consequences, and accepting they may even be death. There is a profound subtlety of the submitted soul that can be found in his example; a theme and an attitude that I hope to explore today, both in an historical context and as it applies to us in a practical way.

SUBMISSION AND AQEEDAH

All of the major Prophets who we are speaking about in this series, up to the Prophet Mohammed صلى الله عليه وسلم, interface with life and death in similar ways. Beginning with the Prophet Adam عليه السلام, we can see that each Prophet was tested by their mortality and the mortality of those they loved.

As we understand from Suura Ta Ha, Hazrat Adam عليه السلام was vulnerable to the Whisperer because of his fears of mortality.

فَوَسْوَسَ إِلَيْهِ الشَّيْطَانُ قَالَ يَا آدَمُ هَلْ أَدُلُّكَ عَلَى شَجَرَةِ الْخُلْدِ
وَمُلْكٍ لَا يَبْلَى

FA-WASWASA ILAYHI-SH-SHAYTĀNU QĀLA YĀ
ĀDAMU HAL ADULLUKA 'ALĀ SHAJARATI-L-
KHULDI WA MULKIL-LĀ YAB'LĀ.

Shaytan whispered to him, saying "Oh Adam! Shall I lead you to the Tree of Eternal Life and a Kingdom that will never decay?" [20:120]

So we see he is deceived by Iblis into thinking that if he eats from the tree, he will have immortality. When in fact, he had immortality, and then was given mortality; thus mortality enters the picture with Hazrat Adam عليه السلام.

The Prophet Noah عليه السلام defied death (by the will of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah*)), living for 950 years, but in that time he was faced with the death (and loss of faith) of his son. As Qur'an tells us, this loss is the one thing he questioned Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah*) about.

And then we come to The Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام who faces this same choice as it relates to his past (his father), his present (him own life), and future (his son). We will return and explore this further, but first let us follow the theme to the Prophet Musa عليه السلام who was saved from the death decreed by Pharaoh as a baby, but must face it again in difficult ways; when his guide, Khidr kills the young boy, and finally is denied entrance into Canaan and dies apparently without completing his sojourn.

Of course, mortality is also a central theme of the legacy of the Prophet Isa عليه السلام who faces his own death with a question of being forsaken, according to the Injeel and who Qur'an says,

وَقَوْلِهِمْ إِنَّا قَتَلْنَا الْمَسِيحَ ... وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ وَلَكِنْ شُبِّهَ

هَمْ

WA QAWLIHIM INNĀ QATALNĀ-L-MASIHA ... WA
MĀ QATALŪHU WA MĀ ṢALABŪHU WA LĀKIN
SHUBBIHA LAHUM ...

They say "We killed the Messiah..." They neither killed him nor did they crucify him, but it only appeared so to them... [4:157]

And then, we have the Prophet Mohammed ﷺ who faced death again and again (in the year of sorrow, as he is hiding in the cave, in each of the battles, and attempts on his life) but ultimately seals the line of Prophets with a natural death having completed his mission and created a lasting legacy of hope and guidance for all people; a behest that lives today and still grows and touches hearts anew each day around this globe (*alhamdulillah-Llaah*). Our Prophet's ﷺ attitude toward death was one of complete submission, saying, "O Allah! Keep me alive as long as life is better for me, and let me die if death is better for me." [Sahih Al-Bukhari – Book 70 Hadith 575]

What is important about this pattern that I bring to your attention today? It is a pattern that exemplifies that attitude of the greatest prophets; it reflects what they chose and what they valued. Certainly, the will to live is one of our most basic genetic messages, and thus our mortality and the passing of those we love is probably one of the greatest fears of any human being; but all these Prophets faced and overcame this fear, submitting to Allah's will and destiny, not with a passive acceptance but through action and choice—as we will see again and again in the story of the Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام.

All these prophets come to active faith based on *aqedah* and *akhlaaq*, which is exactly what the Prophet Mohammed ﷺ said he came to affirm. I want to pause for a moment to look more closely at these words, as they are a window into understanding the inner reality of the hearts and intentions of the *Ambiyaa'*, and reflect exactly the character and qualities of the man, Ibrahim عليه السلام who we are speaking about today.

'*Aqedah* refers to those matters that are believed in, with certainty and conviction, in one's heart and soul. They are not tainted with any doubt.

The word stems from the root '*aqada*, which conveys meanings of certainty, affirmation, confirmation, etc.

In the Sura al-Maa'idah, it says:

لَا يُؤَاخِذُكُمُ اللَّهُ بِاللَّغْوِ فِي أَيْمَانِكُمْ وَلَكِنْ يُؤَاخِذُكُمْ بِمَا عَقَّدْتُمُ
الْأَيْمَانَ

LĀ YU'ĀKHIDhUKUMU-LLAHU BI-LLAGhWI FI
AYMĀNIKUM WA LĀKINŶ-YU'ĀKHIDhUKUM
BIMĀ 'AQQADhTUMU-L-'AYMĀNA...

Allah will not take you to task for what is unintentional
in your oaths, but He will take you to task for (breaking)
your deliberate oaths you have sworn in earnest. [5:89]

The verb translated here as "deliberate oaths" is 'Aqada/ta'qeed, which
refers to determination in the heart. It may be said in Arabic, 'aqada'l-
habl (the rope was tied, i.e., it was pulled tight together).

The word *i'tiqad* (belief) is also derived from this root, and has the
meaning of tying up and making strong. The phrase *d'taqadtu kadhaa*
means "I believe; I am convinced of it in my heart; and this is a
rational conviction." This conviction of the heart; believe that
infuses the character, is what we see in the example of the Prophets.
As Allah (*Subhaanahu wa 'ad'aulaa*) tells us in Sura al-Baqarah:

آمَنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلٌّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ
وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْ رُسُلِهِ وَقَالُوا سَمِعْنَا
وَأَطَعْنَا غُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ

ĀMANA-R-RASŪLU BIMĀ UŶNZILA ILAYHI MIR-
RABBIHI WA-L-MU'MINŪNA KULLUN ĀMANA
BI-LLĀHI WA MALĀA'IKATIHI WA KUTUBIHI WA
RUSULIHI LĀ NUFARRIQU BAYNA AHĀDİM-MIR-
RUSULIHI WA QĀLŪ SAMINĀ WA ATA'NĀ
GHUFRĀNAKA RABBANĀ WA'ILAYKA-L-MASĪR.

The Messenger believes in what was sent down to him
from his Lord, and the believers (also). All of them
securely believe in Allah and His angels and His books
and His messengers. We make no distinction between
any one of His messengers. They [each] say, 'We hear
and we obey. Grant us forgiveness, our Lord, and unto
You is the final destination' [2:285]

Belief (*aqeedah*) must be tied to character, so let us look briefly at
Akhlaaq: "*Akhlaaq* is the plural of the word *khulq* which means
disposition. "Disposition" is a faculty (*malakah*) of the (self) (*nafs*)
which unconsciously inspires activities. *Malakah* comes into
existence through repetitive practice and is not easily destroyed.
Practice and conscious effort create a character which, if persistent,
will eventually produce a disposition. Thus, it is not enough to
simply say "I believe," but it must be practiced, tested, repeated, and
tested again—as we see so clearly illustrated in the life of the Prophet
Ibrahim ؑ.

"Although *fitrah* produces certain dispositions, man can surpass
nature through free will and effort. While dispositions caused by
mental faculties (i.e., intelligence, memory, mental agility) are not
alterable, all others can change."

*Anas, the brother of Abu Dharr, is narrated as saying: "I
saw him (the Prophet), he would enjoin the people to
good character and conduct." The Prophet also said,
"The most complete of believers in iman (faith) are
those who are best in character."*

This teaching of the efficacy of developing a character of faith,
sacrifice, and submission is little understood in its applicability to our
lives today. Few have even the ability to grasp the subtleties of
establishing this as ones disposition. Yet it is my firm belief that in
our tradition, the tradition of Tasawwuf, we can both find and live
the meaning and eternal metaphor for life, conscious decisions, and
the interface between the inner world and outer world through the
progressive establishment of such character.

I hope that we can understand from the stories and example of the Prophet The Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام, more of what is required for us to develop the trust and trustworthiness, love and self-sacrifice needed to be the friend of the friends of Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) and to follow, in our meager ways, in the footsteps of a True Friend of Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ta'aalaa*). I hope our hearts are awake enough to really appreciate the essential uniqueness of the Prophets and the sacrifices they made.

TRANSFORMATIVE TESTS OF IBRAHIM عليه السلام

When we read through Qur'an, we see how many opportunities the Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام had, from his childhood to his old age, for submission and sacrifice. At an early age he goes through a transformative change, a realization if the power of the Unity of Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ta'aalaa*).

وَكَذَلِكَ نُرِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ مَلَكُوتَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلِيَكُونَ مِنَ

الْمُوقِنِينَ

فَلَمَّا جَنَّ عَلَيْهِ اللَّيْلُ رَأَى كَوْكَبًا قَالَ هَذَا رَبِّي فَلَمَّا أَفَلَ قَالَ لَا

أُحِبُّ الْآفِلِينَ

فَلَمَّا رَأَى الْقَمَرَ بَازِعًا قَالَ هَذَا رَبِّي فَلَمَّا أَفَلَ قَالَ لَيْنَ لَمْ يَهْدِنِي

رَبِّي لَأَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الضَّالِّينَ

فَلَمَّا رَأَى الشَّمْسَ بَازِعَةً قَالَ هَذَا رَبِّي هَذَا أَكْبَرُ فَلَمَّا أَفَلَتْ قَالَ

يَا قَوْمِ إِنِّي بَرِيءٌ مِمَّا تُشْرِكُونَ

إِنِّي وَجَّهْتُ وَجْهِيَ لِلَّذِي فَطَرَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ خَنِيفًا وَمَا أَنَا

مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

... NURI IB⁴RĀHIMA MALAKŪTA-S-SAMĀWĀTI
WA-L-'ARDI WA LIYAKŪNA MINA-L-MŪQININ.

FA-LAMMĀ JANNA 'ALAYHI-LLAYLU RĀA'A
KAWKABAŇ QĀLA HĀDhĀ RABBĪ FA-LAMMĀ
AFALA QĀLA LĀ UHIBBU-L-'ĀFILIN.

FA-LAMMĀ RĀA'A-L-QAMARA BĀZIGHAŇ QĀLA
HĀDhĀ RABBĪ FA-LAMMĀ AFALA QĀLA LA'IL-
LAM YAH DINĪ RABBĪ LĀKŪNANNA MINA-L-
QAWMI-D-DĀLLIN.

FA-LAMMĀ RĀA'A-SH-SHAMSA BĀZIGHATAŇ
QĀLA HĀDhĀ RABBĪ HĀDhĀ AKBARU FA-LAMMĀ
AFALAT QĀLA YĀ QAWMI INNĪ BARĪ'UM-MIMMĀ
TUSHRIKŪN.

INNĪ WA JJAHTU WA J⁴HIYA LI-LLADhĪ FA-TARA-
S-SAMĀWĀTI WA-L-'ARDA HANIFAŇW-WA MĀ
ANĀ MINA-L-MUSHRIKIN...

...We showed Ibrahim the Dominion [of Allah over] the heavens and the earth, that he might be of those who are certain.

When the night covered him with darkness, he saw a star, and he said "That is my lord!" But when it set, he said, "I do not love that which sets."

And when he saw the moon rising in splendor, he said "That is my lord!" but when it set, he said, "If my lord does not guide me I shall be of those who are astray."

And when he saw the sun rising in glory, he said, "That is my lord! It is the biggest." And when it set he said, "Oh my people, I am free of what you associate [with Allah]." [6: 75-79].

The transformation from confusion to certainty illustrated by these four simple ayat of Sura al-Anam is critically important to our

understanding of this Prophet and our understanding of ourselves. Allah (*Subhaanahu wa 'ad'aaalaa*) says that he showed the Prophet Ibrahim His dominion over Heaven and Earth so that he might be certain. (Remember our discussion of *aqeedah* earlier).

Through the Prophet Ibrahim's own experiences—seeing the stars, the moon, the sun rise and then set,—The Prophet Ibrahim graduates to a place of certainty, certainty in his belief, in his faith, and in his submission to Allah (*Subhaanahu wa 'ad'aaalaa*). In this example we can take the celestial bodies (star, sun, moon) both as reality and metaphor for the transformation of his faith.

But let us not be deceived; the confusion or uncertainty that he experienced was a veil that was lifted by *tareeqah*, *ma'rifah* and *haqeeqah* to reveal a permanent gift of Allah's to him, and to all the Prophets.

Just as an electron microscope lifts the veil of gross materiality to reveal the atoms that were always present and gave foundation to the material element, the stories of the revelations to and from the Prophet Ibrahim ﷺ are testimonies to the gifts of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa 'ad'aaalaa*) and the efficacy of his inherent character. Characteristics that we all share, in some much smaller degree, but which are stimulated and activated in us by the stories, the revelations and the lives of the *Ambiyaa'* and the *Awliyaa'u-Llaah*. A revelation is an uncovering that directs us to the one truth; hence Kufr is covering up that truth. The revealer of the Truth is our final goal.

إِنَّ الْمَوْتَ الَّذِي تَفِرُّونَ مِنْهُ فَإِنَّهُ مُلَاقِيكُمْ ثُمَّ تُرَدُّونَ إِلَىٰ عَالِمِ
الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

INNA-L-MAWTA-LLADHI TAFIRRUNA MINHU
FA'INNAHU MULAQIKUM THUMMA
TURADDUNA ILA 'ALIMI-L-GHAYBI WA-SH-
SHAHADATI FA-YUNABBI'UKUM BIMĀ KUNTUM
TA'MALUN.

Truly the death—from which you flee—is assuredly coming to meet you, and you will be brought back to the Knower of the Concealed and the Revealed, and He will tell you all that you have done. Qur'an 62:8

This transformation, from confusion to certainty forms the foundation of the Prophet Ibrahim's character, but we also see that this same certainty is tested again and again in his life. Beginning almost immediately with his father's rejection of his new understanding, as recounted for us in Sura Maryam:

يَا أَبَتِ إِنِّي قَدْ جَاءَنِي مِنَ الْعِلْمِ مَا لَمْ يَأْتِكَ فَاتَّبِعْنِي أَهْدِكَ صِرَاطًا
سَوِيًّا

YĀ ABATI INNĪ QAD⁴ JĀA'ANĪ MINA-L-'ILMI MĀ
LAM YA'TIKA FA-TTABINĪ AHDİKA SIRĀTAN
SAWIYYĀ.

Oh my father! There has come to me knowledge which has not come to you, so follow me and I shall guide you on the path made even and straight" [19:43]

But his father responds:

أَرَأَيْتَ أَنْتَ عَنْ آلِهَتِي يَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ لَئِنْ لَمْ تَنْتَهِ لَأَرْجُمَنَّكَ وَاهْجُرْنِي
مَلِيًّا

...ARĀGHIBUN ANTA 'AN ALIHATI YĀ
IB⁴RĀHĪMU? LA'IL-LAM TĀNTAHI
LARJUMANNAKA WA-HJURNI MALIYYĀ.

...Do you desire to reject my gods, oh Ibrahim? If you do not stop I shall stone you. Leave me [alone] for a good long while. [19:46]

This is his father—who raised him, who he knows and loves— saying that he will stone him. In essence he is facing the choice between his father and Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ʿalaa*). But the Prophet Ibrahim responds with patience and kindness, already having put his reliance in Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ʿalaa*), he says to his father:

سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكَ سَأَسْتَغْفِرُ لَكَ رَبِّي إِنَّهُ كَانَ بِي حَفِيًّا

SALĀMUN ʿALAYKA SĀSTAGHʿFIRU LAKA RABBI
INNAHU KĀNA BĪ ḤAFIYYĀ.

Peace be upon you. I shall ask my Lord to forgive you.
Truly He has [always] been kind [to] me. [19:47]

Not long after this the entire community rejects him for his smashing of the idols and they decree that he should be burned. They made a hole in the ground and set it aflame, and it burned with huge sparks and immense flames. There had never been a fire like it. They put the Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام into a catapult in order to throw him into the fire. At that time, Angel Jibreel came to him and said: “*O Ibrahim, Is there anything you wish for?*”

He said: “*I only wish that Allah be pleased with me.*”

The catapult was released, and Ibrahim عليه السلام was thrown in the heart of the fire. When they threw him he said, “*Sufficient for me is Allah, and He is the best disposer of affairs.*”

Saʿid bin Jubayr reported that Ibn ʿAbbas said: “*When Ibrahim was thrown into the fire, the keeper (angel) of the rain said: ‘When will I be commanded to send rain’ But the command of Allah was more swift. Allah said: ‘O fire! Be you cool and safety for Ibrahim!’ and there was no fire left on earth that was not extinguished.*”

So again we see that the Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام values the friendship and help of Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ʿalaa*) over acceptance from the community and even over his own life.

But as we know, this is not his last test. Later in his life he and his family were walking from where he had settled, which is now in Palestine at the place of the Beir Saba, the Seven Wells at the edge the cultivated land, across the deserts and mountains of Siin. Finally, they reached a patch of desert in the Arabian Peninsula, he with his wife and child. They sat in this horribly dry valley of black basalt. The only thing that was left there in that uncultivated valley that had no trees, no water, and no food of any kind, no sign of life was the ruins of a foundation left from before the flood of Noah عليه السلام.

These ruins were the remains of an ancient house founded by Adam and Hawa (may Allah protect their memory). The reason was Allah had decided this was the place for them to settle. After the Prophet Ibrahim had helped his wife and child to dismount, he left them with a small amount of food, hardly enough for three days. He turned around and walked away, and Hagar ran after him.

She said, “Where are you going? Are you leaving us in this barren valley?” And he didn’t answer her but continued his walking. She repeated what she had said, and he remained silent. Finally, after a few attempts, she understood that he was acting not on his own will, but on the will of Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ʿalaa*). She said, “Did Allah command you to do this?” And he finally answered, “Yes.” Then she said, “We are not going to be lost, since Allah, Who has commanded you, is with us.” Then Ibrahim عليه السلام invoked Allah by saying:

رَبَّنَا إِنِّي أَسْكَنْتُ مِنْ دُرِّيِّ بَوَادٍ غَيْرِ ذِي زَرْعٍ عِنْدَ بَيْتِكَ الْمُحَرَّمِ
رَبَّنَا لِتَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ فَاجْعَلْ أَفْئِدَةً مِنَ النَّاسِ تَهْوِي إِلَيْهِمْ وَارْزُقْهُمْ
مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَشْكُرُونَ

رَبَّنَا إِنَّكَ تَعْلَمُ مَا نُخْفِي وَمَا نُعْلِنُ وَمَا يَخْفَى عَلَى اللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ
فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ

RABBANĀ INNĪ ASKAN̄TU MIN̄ DhURRIYYATI
BIWĀDIN GhAYRI DhĪ ZAR'IN 'IN̄DA BAYTIKA-L-
MUHARRAMI RABBANĀ LIYUQIMŪ AS-SALĀTA
FA-J¹-¹AL AF'IDATAM-MINA-N-NĀSI TAHWĪ
ILAYHIM WA-RZUQ¹HUM MINA-Th-ThAMARĀTI
LA'ALLAHUM YASHKURŪN

RABBANĀ INNAKA TA'LAMU MĀ NUKhFI WA MĀ
NU'LINU WA MĀ YAKhFĀ 'ALĀ-LLĀHI MIN̄
SHAY'IN̄ FI-L-'ARDI WA LĀ FI-S-SAMĀĀ'.

O our Lord! Truly I have settled my offspring in an uncultivated valley near to Your Inviolable House, Our Lord, that they may establish salat. So make the hearts of people to incline to them and provide for them fruits that they may be grateful.

Ya Rabb, truly You know what we hide and what we proclaim, nothing is hidden from Allah in the earth or the heavens. [Qur'an 14:37-38]

What a beautiful *difaa* he makes here in Sura Ibrahim; accepting Allah's command and asking for the protection of his family, even as he leaves them behind. He doesn't know what will happen to them; reason and rationality say they will probably starve or die of dehydration or heat exhaustion. All he knows is that his following Allah's command. Who else could have said that?

These were tests not just of the Prophet Ibrahim ؑ but tests for all who loved him, who depended on him, and who followed him.

Hagar's faith and his *difaa* were answered. We know the Angel Jibreel ؑ, revealed the means in the form of the well of ZemZem, and they guaranteed once again that the valley would be settled. Ismail grew into puberty under the eyes of Hagar and among tribes; tribes who were attracted to the valley by birds flying overhead, because there was water.

One might think that this should be it; that would be his last trial; that Allah would not test his friend and loyal servant. But we will remember, of course, that then comes the message to sacrifice his son Ismail ؑ.

We are all familiar with this story but what is important here is that this was another test of his submission, his patience, his trust in Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*).

What appears to us as a test may also be seen as a 'revelation,' an unveiling to a Prophet and to us. For in each of these test and each of these Prophets we too see degrees of typical human responses: Repentance in Adam ؑ, Questioning in Nuh ؑ, hesitation in Ibrahim ؑ, anger in Musa ؑ, and an initial confusion and disorientation in the Prophet Mohammed ﷺ. Hence we can see these 'tests' and 'trials' as opportunities, crossroads of faith and submission, as they were clearly intended to be by Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) who says in Sura as-Saaaffat.

إِنَّ هَذَا هُوَ الْبَلَاءُ الْمُبِينُ

INNA HĀDHĀ LAHUWA-L-BALĀĀ'U AL-MUBIN.

Truly that was a clear test [of both his submission and obedience]. [37: 106]

The certainty, the idealism, the conviction that Ibrahim ؑ felt as a young man looking at the night sky so long ago must surely have been tested, again and again: as he was rejected by his father, as he leaves his wife and son (possibly to die) in the desert, when his is asked to sacrifice his son. Yet he passes these tests, not because he devalues life or doesn't love his family, but because he loves them, because he loves Allah and knows that loving Allah, serving Allah, obeying Allah is more important than him or his family; more important than life or death.

THE LIBERATING POWER OF SACRIFICE

There are those who hear these stories and hear only of hardship, pain, and sacrifice. But I think we have all had a little knowledge of hardship, pain, or loss in our lives, and thus, I hope we also have had the opportunity to personally learn that the day-to-day sacrifices and tests are also a means of turning away from evil and selfishness and toward Allah (*Subhaanahu wa 'alaa*); toward an inner (and outer) life of peace and tranquility.

Like Sidna Ibrahim ؑ and Sidna Ismail ؑ, we too are afforded the opportunity to have faith. We too are tested, and we too can try to rise above selfish desires to the level of love that transcends the common.

I hope that as we recount these stories and lessons today you do not hear it any way other than as deeply personal. I pray to Allah we can all apply these lessons to our life today and to our decision tomorrow. At some point, we are all asked to give something up; to choose what we value over what we want, to choose between our self and Allah, between this life and the next. And like the Prophet Ibrahim ؑ, sometimes the more we choose Allah, the more opportunities we are given to re-choose, to re-focus; to re-affirm our certainty.

We live in a world of virtual reality in which we can experience from afar the actual lives of people who are very distant from us. Pick up a magazine; go on line to a news site, read the accounts of war, torture, financial ruin, fears, rebellion, rational and totally irrational thinking and acting. Humanity now gathers daily in our TV's and our computer screens. These accounts, these narratives, these tests and trials—here, there, in cities and countryside of Syria, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, China, the Congo;; all these are reflections of the sacrifice and choices our father the Prophet Ibrahim had to make.

What we must understand from this is that life as a series of opportunities to trust. None so great as the opportunities given The Prophet Ibrahim, but we can find the place of "Ibrahim" and

"Ismail" within our own self; a place that responds, as Ismail did: **"Allah willing you will find me patient."**

To do that, we have to understand something that is perhaps a little disconcerting: we have to understand the liberating power of submission and sacrifice, the liberating power of absolute selfless service. We must not only understand, but also consciously embrace the reality, even though at times this brings some level of change and discomfort. These tests and trials are not about momentary discomfort but about the perpetuity and sustainability of love, faith, trust and humility.

Students have often asked me: "do you ever get to a point on this journey where you can stop striving, stop struggling, stop sacrificing?" While there are certain stations that can be achieved, which once achieved, the seeker can't fall below, the reality is that all life is a process of striving; striving for strength, submitting to the elements, creating and supporting the next generation; the fruit of life. Truly it can become a quality of our character, no longer a negative aspect of life; but rather an opportunity to affirm the One True Divine Presence.

Surely, when we look at the lives of these great Prophets we see that they were given test after test. Asking when one can stop striving is like asking when one gets to stop eating, or sleeping, or exercising. Certainly, a station can be achieved in which this is less important, but only in the next world do we complete transcend this necessity.

And thus, I return to my opening point about these messengers and their relationship with mortality. Theirs was a relationship not with death itself, per se, but with eternity; with the Unity of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa 'alaa*); Allah the true goal and the True Friend.

Why, then, do we find it so difficult to understand our own place in this process? Why can it be so difficult to sacrifice our individual selfish nature to the very same objective? Do any of us really believe we will not be called upon to make hard choices eventually? Even if we can dodge this sacrifice or that opportunity, another one is on its

way. And yet we still struggle to make even the smallest selfless choices?

In accepting the positive and inspiring aspect of sacrifice itself—embracing sacrifice—we are following in the footsteps of Sidna Ibrahim عليه السلام. We are embracing the love of our kin and our fellow beings in our love for Allah (*Subhānahu wa ʿālaaa*), and empowering and preparing others for life and worship of Allah (*Subhānahu wa ʿālaaa*). We are accepting the immediate and complete relationship with our own destiny, with our Creator; a relationship that liberates our minds and hearts from the illusion of self-importance.

This tends to be hard for most people. We can all identify with the difficulty of this challenge. It is not about living for our selves. Our self-interest is valid only insofar as we continue striving to maximize our potential and our creativity for the purpose of sustaining life for future generations to seek that very same Truth.

It can be difficult for us to de-condition ourselves from our ideas and fantasies about life. We tend to think in very materialistic, personal, career-oriented ways that somehow makes us believe that Allah's plan for us is other than perpetuating and striving toward knowledge; other than sustaining of our community; other than focusing on our faith and the worship of Him in our actions and hearts. But, indeed, that is what it is about. That is what it is what it has been about since the beginning of time.

Abu Hurayra reported that the Messenger of Allah taught this by saying: **"This world is the prison of the believer and the paradise of the unbeliever."** [Muslim]

Each generation has the opportunity to live this lesson; to live in harmony with the creation, to build upon the previous generation's work, to meet the tests that come, that finally, if passed, liberate us from the sense of distance and loneliness from the Creator. Yet each generation tends to miss that opportunity by transferring the ultimate goal to something worldly and temporary.

That is not to say Allah (*Subhānahu wa ʿālaaa*) did not provide us with the appreciation of His Creation. That is not to say Allah did not give us the joy of work, or the sweetness of love, or the ability to feel fulfilled. Quite the contrary: all are part of the 'consciousness' that separates human beings from the rest of creation, and which enables us to improve upon the conditions of others, to work to sustain life, and growth, and embrace knowledge and create wisdom, and to pursue nearness to Allah (*Subhānahu wa ʿālaaa*).

Trees cannot get up and move because they don't like the place they are in. "There is more sun on the other side of the stream; I'm going to move over there." Birds have very regular migration patterns. But we have this ability to make changes. We can even influence changes in the bird's migration patterns through pollution and global warming. Our power to change is our blessing and our curse.

Every one of those benefits, the sweetness of love, the feeling of fulfillment, the joy of work, the joy of just seeing someone on occasion, have tests and trials that come along with them—small ones. How do our challenges compare to any one of the tests of The Prophet Ibrahim?

To live and struggle or to thrive in the conditions and situations we find ourselves in is the basis of all our trials and tests. Embrace them!

FINDING THE INNER PROPHET IBRAHIM

The stories of the sacrifices of Sidna Ibrahim عليه السلام have many facets. But today I hope I am discussing what I see as their relevance to us in a real and necessary way for the world we find ourselves inhabiting, a world that demands our conscious participation, not merely being present in the physical sense.

We—Muslims, members of Tariqah, of this family, sitting in this *jam'at*—must embrace the greater community, not the lesser self, the greater love, the greater courage, the joy of giving and of patience, the pleasure of service and study and the wisdom and liberating joy of perseverance and self sacrifice.

Remember; this is not theoretical today. We must learn to participate in the greater struggle; we must find the inner Ismail عليه السلام and the inner Ibrahim عليه السلام. We must truly understand how to see the life we have been given, and moreover to see the place we have been placed, and the service we have been receiving and giving as the greatest means to personal and spiritual, collective and individual fulfillment, maturity, and awakening.

These opportunities that we are afforded by Allah (*Subhaanahu wa 'Alaalaahu*) should not be turned away from. Don't avert your eyes from those opportunities. Even in the smallest and seemingly most individual ways, ways that asks of us limited sacrifice, limited discomfort, may very well be the ultimate keys to our happiness and overcoming of our most basic weaknesses.

Is there one among us who doesn't have a weakness? Ask yourself what discomfort can I tolerate? What difficulty can I bear that could relieve the discomfort of another person? What act or word of self-protection or self discomfort can I abandon in order to create harmony and avoid discord, create an environment of relief instead of an environment of tension, of support instead of abandonment? These small sacrifices are the subtlest and the most profound means of personal transformation. This attitude of putting the self last, the acts of service, are what makes Sidna Ibrahim and Sidna Ismail, all the *ambiyā*, all the *awliyā* not just Muslims, not just *mu'min*, but *murād*, the dearest friends Allah.

Truly, acts of humaneness, acts of love and appreciation, acts of gratitude to Allah by service and gratitude to a brother, a sister, a friend, a parent, the guide and the fellow guided; even a small and sustained low level of sacrifice—nothing as monumental of those of Sidna Ibrahim عليه السلام—is a balm for the soul, a staircase to transforming the *nafs ammaarah*, a way of preparation for life.

From our childhood we should learn this, a preparation for life by bearing and embracing these small sacrifices and services. For a child, it might be carrying the plate to the sink and washing it off, making the bed, putting the clothes away, deferring to the parent or sibling.

This is a teaching for us adults, also. Each one of us has small sacrifices to make, small opportunities. But sometimes we think of them as big burdens. They are preparations for work, for marriage, for parenthood, for sustaining friendship, for journeying further and further within...in the *baatin*, for a life here and for those of us older and further along in life, for a life in the hereafter.

Why should we, we who have lived this life as Sufis, as Muslims *inshaa'a-Llah* as *mu'minuun*, allow ourselves any level of selfishness when we can easily be changed by small discomforts, for brief periods of time, or minimum effort of service?

This time, today, is an opportunity for reflection on our own service and sacrifices. This, right now, is **our** opportunity to strain a bit, and struggle to see our self as part of a larger community—this community, this family, this or that *tareeqah*.

Take a moment to reflect. Think about what your opportunities are to show and to live your Islamic and, if you are of *Tareeqah*, Sufic values. Don't say, "If I do this, then I don't have to do that. If I make this small sacrifice, then I can avoid that greater sacrifice." Don't think like that. Just think about what opportunities are at hand: today, tomorrow, next week, next month, during your life.

What can you choose to do to be selfless? A small sacrifice. Allah is not asking you to walk through fire, or to destroy your parents' way of life; Allah is not asking you to take your child and your wife to the desert and leave them. Take a moment and think about the sacrifices you can make, the sacrifices that your "inner Ibrahim" would make.

GIVING AND RECEIVING

I yearned for years for the guidance I have just given you, on the importance of sacrifice, and then when I got it, it took me years to appreciate it. As you know, we hear only when and what we choose to hear; the rest is wind through the leaves of the tree.

Who among us rises to the occasion, sees and seize the moments when we perceive the need or the opportunity to assist our husband,

our wife, our child, our parent, our brother and sister, our friend, our guide, let alone our fellow traveler? Who even looks to see what their need is? Or are we too focused on our own needs, our own problems, and our own challenges to see or consider the needs of others? Or, if we do see them, we brush them aside: "Me? I have no way to assist," or "If I am needed, I will be asked; I will be told how to help."

I remember sitting one day with my Shaykh, Hazrat Azad Rasool, and I had noticed for days that he had holes in his socks, because I was praying behind him. I was thinking, "Oh, he has holes in his socks." And then one day he turns to me and says, "If you know anyone going into town, could you ask someone to get me some socks?"

I said, "Oh, I saw that and I wanted to get you some socks." So we get him some socks, and he has money in his hand.

"*Astaghfiru-Llah*, I can't take it" I said.

"But you have to take it."

"Hazrat, I cannot take your money. I saw you had holes in your socks, and I was going to get you socks anyway."

"But, you didn't. So if I ask for something, I pay for it. If you give it, it's something different."

He calmly, peacefully, says to me, "But you didn't, and if I ask for something, then I pay for it."

Listen carefully, because I am telling you what I have learned. Truly service and sacrifice seem to be opposites. But to the Sufi, to the truly humane being, personal spiritual gain (and even worldly recognition at time) comes bountifully from both.

Sidna Ibrahim ؑ and Sidna Ismail ؑ exemplify this. There is a relationship of love and trust, illustrated in their mutual respect and concern. When the Prophet Ibrahim ؑ reveals his experience in

sleep...some say dream, but the word is *manama*...in the bed, or by extension, rest or sleep. The element of doubt exists, since dreams can be deceiving. He asked his son his advice. Remember, Ibrahim ؑ was man who gave advice to his father, now he turns to his son and asks him for advice. How old is his son? An adolescent; Qur'an says "old enough to work by his side." And he says to his son:

إِنِّي أَرَى فِي الْمَنَامِ أَنِّي أَذْبَحُكَ فَانْظُرْ مَاذَا تَرَى

INNĪ ARĀ FI-L-MANĀMI ANNĪ ADhBAHUKA FA-
NDhUR MĀDhĀ TARĀ?

Oh my son, I have seen in a dream that I must sacrifice you; so look, what is your view?" (37:102)

And his son replies:

يَا أَبَتِ افْعَلْ مَا تُؤْمَرُ سَتَجِدُنِي إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مِنَ الصَّابِرِينَ

YĀ ABATI IF'AL MĀ TU'MAR: SATAJIDUNĪ IN
SHĀA'A-LLĀHU MINA-S-SĀBIRIN.

Oh my father, do what you are ordered. By the Will of Allah, you shall find me steadfastly patient" (37:102)

Patient. Not willing, not brave, not resigned, but patient, persevering. He could have said, "I'll be courageous. I'll be strong." But he says "By the Will of Allah, you shall find me steadfastly patient."

Certainly this is big patience, but can we not apply this to our own lives?

Seeking and finding this inner station of patience is an important goal, but it is predicated on transforming our own disposition, our own inner reality in order to even contemplate grasping the inner Divine Presence. Allah praises in Sura ar-Ra'da

وَالَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا ابْتِعَاءَ وَجْهِ رَبِّهِمْ

ALLADHINA SABARŪ IB⁴TIGHĀA'A WAJ⁴HI
RABBIHIM

those who persevere in seeking the Face of their Lord...
[13:22]

Striving dominates this process of perseverance as we realize it is an impossible task in material and even metaphysical terms to actually "see" Allah. We can learn to 'see' by the light of Allah swt, the Divine Presence, the light in all creation and within our self.

As I have pointed out many times, this process is an inner process that results from our intention, our attitude, our practices (salah etc) and then manifests outwardly quite naturally as our character, aqcedah, and *akhlaaq*. To be an enlightened being according to the Qur'an is to be a *muhsin* (a doer of good). It is recorded in this ayah:

وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ دِينًا مِّمَّنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ وَاتَّبَعَ مِلَّةَ
إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَاتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ خَلِيلًا

WA MAN AHSANU DINAM-MIMMAN ASLAMA WA
J⁴HAHU LI-LLĀHI WA HUWA MUHSINUN-WA-
TTABA'A MILLATA IB⁴RĀHĪMA HANĪFAN-WA-
TTAKHADHA-LLĀHU IB⁴RĀHĪMA KHALILĀ.

And who can be better in religion than one who submits his essential being to God; and he is a *Muhsin*. And follows the religion of Abraham—Hanifa. And God did take Abraham as an intimate friend. (4:125)

Muhsin is the turning of one's inner life to the reality of God. So we see the affirmation of the essence of Sufism here; *mutawwajuh*, the turning away from outer distraction to inner tranquility (*sakeenah*). Abdullah Ansari writes of Patience:

Patience is observed over afflictions on account of (true) love and it produces three things: one-sidedness of the heart; discerning knowledge (*'ilm*); light of sagacity.

The patience of (or abandonment of) sins is due to fear of Divinity Almighty and it produces three things: intention in hearts; acceptance of the supplication; light of cleanliness.

The patience over (or indulgence in complete) obedience is due to hopefulness. It also generates three things: disappearance of the calamities; grant of sustenance unexpectedly; inclination toward virtues.

How can we better practice patience (of any and every kind) in our life? What about today when you go home, or tomorrow when you go to work? What in our character can we focus on, ask assistance with to change; bring true patience and perseverance to; so that the larger trials may be met with ease and trust and faith and patience?

Or will we continue to go along the road of hopeful ignorance and arrogance, or fearful avoidance, as some of us do. We don't want to rock the boat too much; so we wait for that test that we can't avoid, and hope that we will somehow find a cache of patience, selflessness, and perseverance in that moment. Not having to prepare for it at all, will we wait for the big test to come and say, "Ah, now I'm going to be ready for it"?

But we can begin to prepare today. For a second time I ask you to pause and think about this. Do you have something that requires patience in your life? Do you avoid things or people because they make you impatient? Just as there is the Wisdom of Solomon there is the sacrifice of Ibrahim.

SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SMALL SACRIFICE

These events in the life of the Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام, have not been forgotten for over 3 millenniums. That in itself is amazing. Yet in the moment when we are anxious and seek to avoid discomfort, we forget not only the lesson of our forefathers, but of our own

experiences or teachings. From one challenge to the next we forget until our next discomfort or personal disturbance comes, and we look around for help, and pray to Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ʿalaa*) for relief.

For a moment we may appreciate the *madad* of our *shuyukh*, our *shaykh*, and the kindness of our spiritual family. Then again we forget or separate our needs from the needs of others. We must strengthen our faith and trust in Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ʿalaa*), in the Prophet ﷺ, and in our *shuyukh*, for this is the step by step way to uplift our soul, and awaken our hearts, and see with the eyes that see.

It is easy in the maze of issues that demand our attention and time, to lose sight of the small and meaningful (and transformational) opportunities for service and sacrifice. Sometimes, just maintaining minimal spiritual balance is the greatest challenge to imagine the immensity of the trust and submission of Ibrahim عليه السلام.

What most of us are being tested and tried by are momentary discomforts and difficulties.

But not one of us has been asked to go by horseback, camelback, or by foot from Palestine to the basalt mountains of Arabia. In comparison, we are asked for small sacrifices. And if we seize the opportunity to make conscious decisions to turn toward Allah as the Prophet Ibrahim did, then we begin to see with eyes of devotion and attend to the commands of Allah swt.

We are interrelated by our devotion and our attachment to the Ummah. We are bonded together by being part of humanity, and part and parcel of this community and the larger community of those who serve. This was affirmed by the first statement of the first revelation to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ:

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ

IQ'RA' BI'ISMI RABBIKA-LLADHI KHALAQ'.

KhALAQA-L-'INSAANA MIN 'ALAQ'.

Read in the Name of your Lord Who created, created the human being from a clot. (96:1-2)

Created from a "clot," *'Alaqa* uses both the biological reality "to hang, suspend; what is precious," and the larger metaphor of *ta'aluq* "attachment, bond devotion, relation, affiliation, devotion, affection" to describe both the physical and the subtle reality of our existence and our relationship.

The Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام and his son, of blood and flesh, are united in a bond of trust and submission to Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ʿalaa*), a relationship that, in this example, transcends their blood relationship. We learn from that Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ʿalaa*) is not interested in the blood and flesh, but only in the act of submission, in the willingness to make personal sacrifice and trust. This has always been the message. As Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ʿalaa*) clearly explains in Sura al-Hajj when speaking of another sacrifice:

لَنْ يَنَالَ اللَّهَ لُحُومُهَا وَلَا دِمَاؤُهَا وَلَكِنْ يَنَالُهُ التَّقْوَىٰ مِنْكُمْ

LA'NY-YANALA-LLAHA LUHUMUHA WA LA DIMAA'UHA WA LA'KI'NY-YANALUHU-T-TAQ'WA MI'NKUM...

It is not their meat or their blood that reaches Allah. But it is your consciousness of Allah and your warding off evil that reaches Him... [22:37]

This is the message of Sidna Ibrahim عليه السلام: to make a small or large sacrifice, to affirm our trust and trustworthiness, to remove a weight or a worry, to uplift a friend or a loved one, to serve our community, brothers, sisters, *shuyukh*.

I used to rack my brain and tear my heart apart to find ways to serve my Hazrat, materially and spiritually. The material part was easier. The greatest joy I had was to relieve a burden from his heart and mind. Maybe it was to just to listen to him talk about not wanting to pay off the people to get a phone line in India, or how to deal with the neighbor who wanted a gate behind the place, or how to get the

workers to come; let alone the *murids* who abandoned him, and the pain that it caused him, to the point he couldn't write the letters. He asked me to write the letters to these people, because he couldn't utter a criticism easily from his mouth.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I reiterate that this message of certainty of faith and of self-less sacrifice is critical and essential one for those who wish to move along this path: a path at times mysterious, and at times difficult; but attested to and affirmed by those who came before; those who passed their tests, and who live on in our knowledge and hearts, and in the stories we recount today. I hope this message has been heard. May Allah forgive me for it being an incomplete and poor re-telling.

Allah is greater; and in that greater-ness is the transformative moment, the possibility for a paradigm shift, a moment within an individual and society that may be, at this time, beyond the horizon, but if we strive within our self, if we assume our responsibility as children of Adam ﷺ, as children of Ibrahim ﷺ, if we embrace the challenges, choose selflessness, and sacrifice just a bit more; it may make the world a bit more just; may draw attention to the inequities and immoralities of human interaction, state sponsored terrorism, the absurdity of violence poverty and unnecessary politicized exploitation of people.

The most constructive way for the Sufi to contribute to the manifestation of a better world is to seek personal transformation and promote social harmony within our own friendships, our own family, our own *Tareeqah*, and community. Just as the popular phrase today is "all politics is local," so too all spiritual progress is personal. It begins (and ends) with ones' self discipline, refinement, and relationship with Allah (*Subhaanahu wa t'aaalaa*).

Don't be distracted or tricked into not seeing the importance of a moment; everything is opportunity. Every day is practice for tomorrow. Today let us begin anew. Each one of us has an opportunity, or ten opportunities. Make that small sacrifice and

maintain it, as it is truly a gift of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa t'aaalaa*) to be a reliever of burdens by good deeds.

Is this too simplistic a message? If it is simplistic, then fulfilling it is simple. If remembering, which is the foundation of progress as a Muslim, is easy for you, *alhamdulillah-Llaah*. If it isn't so easy, well then maybe the message is not as simple as it seems; as simple as it is to articulate.

In a hadith Qudsi, Allah (*Subhaanahu wa t'aaalaa*) says, **"I have decreed My Obligation and have reduced the burden on My slaves, and I shall reward a single good deed as if it were ten good deeds."** (Book #54, Hadith #429)

May Allah enable us all to sacrifice in His Way to the best of our ability, and to remember the depths of the story of the Prophet Ibrahim and Ismail (peace and blessings be upon them both)!

Inshaa'a-Llaah, we can reach to that point each day where we wake up and realize that life is not about accumulating; it is about sacrificing, and we can re-define sacrifice without that aura of pain and loss that comes always with it.

Hasbuna l labu wani'ma-l-wakil. Ni'ma-l-mawla wani'ma-n-nasir. Wa'ufawidu 'amri ila-l-labi' inna --laha basirun bil-ibad. Inna waliyyiya-l-labu-l-ladi nazzala-l-kitaba wanhuu yatawalla-s-salihin'.

Allah (*Subhaanahu wa t'aaalaa*) is our sufficiency, and good is the trustee, the best to protect and the best to help. My own affair I commit to Allah (*Subhaanahu wa t'aaalaa*), for Allah (*Subhaanahu wa t'aaalaa*) ever watches over His Servants. For my Protector is Allah (*Subhaanahu wa t'aaalaa*), Who revealed the Book, and He will befriend the righteous.

Rabbi 'akmil li dini, wa'atmim 'alayya ni'mataka, wa-j'alni 'abdan sakuran, abdan karima.

O my Lord, perfect for me my religion, complete Thy favors upon me, and make me a devotee most grateful, a devotee most generous.

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ
 الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَّةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ
 لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ
 مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ
 يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ
 وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا شَاءَ
 وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ
 وَلَا يَئُودُهُ حِفْظُهُمَا
 وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ

ALLAHU LĀ ILĀHA ILLĀ HUW.
 AL-HAYYU-L-QAYYŪMU LĀ TA'KhUDhUHU
 SINATUŊW-WA LĀ NAWM.
 LAHU MĀ FĪ-S-SAMĀWĀTI WA MĀ FĪ-L-'ARD.
 MAŊ DhĀ-LLADhĪ YASHFA'U 'INDAHU ILLĀ
 BI'DhNIH.
 YA'LAMU MĀ BAYNA AYDĪHIM WA MĀ
 KhALFAHUM.
 WA LĀ YUHĪTŪNA BISHAY'IM-MIN 'ILMIHI ILLĀ
 BIMĀ SHĀA'A.
 WASĪ'A KURSIYYUHU-S-SAMĀWĀTI WA-L-'ARD.
 WA LĀ YAŪDUHU HIFDhUHUMĀ
 WA HUWA-L-'ALIYYU-L-'ADhĪM [2:255]